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# THE DELEGATION FOR THE CHOICE OF AN AUXILIARY INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE.

BY J. F. TWOMBLY.

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THE Middle Ages, unprogressive as it was, had one advantage over us, men of the Modern Age. A moderately educated man could then travel all over Western and Central Europe and have no difficulty in making himself understood. He could converse at his ease with other moderately educated men; he could read with facility what they wrote, could correspond with them, and could go directly from his own university to universities in foreign lands, and there follow courses with little difficulty. With his mediæval Latin he was to some extent more of a "man of the world" than his successor under ordinary circumstances can possibly be.

We may call the Latin of the Middle Ages barbarous, monks' jargon, anything we like; but it certainly was useful. It served the traveller's convenience; it helped science in the Dogmatic Theology of Thomas Aquinas; and even became literature in the *Stabat Mater* of Giacomo da Todi.

This state of things lasted, to some extent, through the Renaissance to the end of the seventeenth century. The State papers of the Commonwealth under Cromwell were written in Latin; so were most of the scientific works in that and the following generations; and in Germany and Italy this practice continued until almost the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Many things combined to destroy the use of Latin as an international language. The supremacy of French politics was one cause; another reason lay in the fact that scientists and men of affairs had not the time to devote to a complicated language like Latin, when they could reach a sufficiently large audience by the use of their own mother tongues, especially in France and Eng-

land. Finally, the exaggerated "purism" of many of the Renaissance scholars and their followers had its effect upon practical men: these scholars magnified the difficulties of Latin, desired to keep the language merely as a beautiful archaeological monument, and frowned down upon all practical uses of the language. They have had their way, and Latin is now for most practical purposes as dead as Egyptian.

For a time, French to some extent took the place of Latin. Many English, German and Italian scholars gained a reading knowledge of that language; and princes and noblemen were brought up by French tutors. This predominance of French was due largely to the political predominance of France; and when the latter disappeared, French as *the* international language disappeared also. England, through its commerce and its political ideas, and Germany, by means of its philosophy, science and military art, gained for their languages a place by the side of French.

We had, then, about thirty years ago, reached this state of affairs: there were three partially international languages—French, German and English—and many educated men tried to learn all three. Generally they failed most miserably.

Now the world has advanced one step more. Russian and Spanish must certainly be considered international languages, both for the extent of territory covered and the literature which is even now being produced by them. Moreover, the little countries demand that their voices be heard in the international assembly. They refuse longer to write even their science in English, German or French.

Meanwhile, science, commerce, politics, social movements and ideas in general, are becoming more and more international in character; and they need more and more a means of international expression. To choose for this purpose one or two of the national languages would be useless; the rest of the world would be up in arms immediately against such a choice, and with justice, too. The idea of reviving Greek or Latin, although not open to the objection of "favoritism," would not really succeed much better. The Greek and Latin professors and students are opposed to this in any practical form: they are "purists"; they object to cutting out the difficulties of those languages; they are opposed to the new words and forms which are absolutely necessary to express

modern ideas. History, moreover, has proved this attempt impracticable.

What, then, are we to do? Use an artificial language—such is the reply of all those who have seriously studied the question, beginning in the seventeenth century with Bishop Wilkins, Descartes and Leibnitz. Many projects and plans for so doing have been put forward during the past two centuries, some sixty of which are described by Drs. Couturat and Leau in their large *"Histoire de la Langue Universelle."*\*

In the beginning of the history of these attempts the inventors "dreamed great dreams"; they proposed to compose philosophical languages, having no relation to the national tongues. Their attempts ended in disaster and confusion.

Later the dreamers grew more modest. They accepted much in the national languages, but they simplified too much the elements derived from these, and added to them complicated grammatical systems. One such plan—Volapük—had for a few years a considerable success. It died, however, like all similar plans, because it did not sufficiently understand the basis upon which an international language must now be built.

The experience of years has in our day plainly pointed out this basis: An international language must grow out of the national languages; *it must stand in relation to them much in the same way as they in their turn stand to local dialects.* To a large extent the international language already exists; it is not to be invented, but to be discovered.

Esperanto, Idiom Neutral, Panroman and other late attempts to solve the question have accepted this solution. Their principle of being consists in selecting words on the basis of already acquired internationality; they differ merely in the application of details. Moreover, one of them, at least, has already proved its practicability and availability: it has spread over the whole world, and is being daily used for all sorts of purposes. We can therefore hope, with good reason, that we shall soon see the effective establishment of a simple, adequate, international, auxiliary language.

In order, however, speedily to realize this happy result, we must do more than discover and build up and use such a language, however good. We must also get other persons, and many other

persons, to use the same language: we must persuade governments and learned societies to take up the matter practically; we must have it taught in schools and colleges.

Now, to do this, to settle the question in the best manner, to select what is best in the various systems, it is necessary to have some recognized authority pass definitely upon the whole matter. This idea entered into the minds of several French scientists some years ago; thereupon they cast about for some means of putting it into practice, with the result of the establishment of the so-called Delegation for the Choice of an International Language. The Delegation seeks, in the first place, the aid of already organized societies—academies, chambers of commerce, scientific corporations and professional associations. Every such society is asked to approve the general plan of the Delegation by a formal vote, and to appoint one of its members as its representative in the Delegation. The duties of such a representative are very simple: first, to act as a receiver of news; and, secondly, to help in the choice of a small committee, which will finally decide the whole question.

Over two hundred and fifty societies have already joined the Delegation. Hitherto, however, the United States has been practically without representation in it. Indeed, until the last few months no one in the United States had even heard of its existence. Such a state of affairs, however, should be remedied immediately. The Delegation intends to settle the matter finally this year; and, if the United States has no voice in this settlement, it will miss a great opportunity. It will not do for our country, which prides itself upon its progressiveness, to fall behind in this important matter; it therefore behooves our learned societies and our commercial bodies to arouse themselves. Let their secretaries send for the circulars and proper subscription blanks. It will take but a few minutes to put the matter before the proper governing boards and societies. It will cost them nothing; and they will be doing something which may prove of incalculable benefit to science, commerce and the general welfare of humanity.

But the Delegation, though laboring primarily with organized societies, has not confined itself to the societies alone. It has also sought the aid of learned individuals, of persons who are entitled to speak with authority upon the need of an auxiliary, interna-

tional language. It has turned for help to University Professors and Academicians, and it has not turned in vain. It has obtained from this source over a thousand signatures, among which are found twenty-five from the famous Institut de France, including such names as Appell, Bouchard, Poincaré, Renouvier, Tarde and Lavisse. In German-speaking lands help has been obtained from men like Ostwald of Leipsic; Koch of Würtemberg; Weiss of Zurich; Mach of Vienna; and Schuchhardt of Graz. The Royal Academy of Sciences, Belgium; the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; the Universities of Kolozsvar (Hungary), Lyons and Geneva have furnished many signatures; and St. Petersburg, Cracow, Christiania, Naples and Edinburgh have all aided in the good work.

In the United States about a hundred names have been secured. Among them are found such as these: William James (Harvard), Hollis (Harvard), Welch (Johns Hopkins), Ormond (Princeton), Macloskie (Princeton), Smith (Vice-Provost, Pennsylvania), Klaeber (University of Minnesota), etc. However, we are not satisfied with this. The United States as the most progressive nation should lead in this matter. Instead of one hundred names, we should have five hundred. Our university professors, therefore, are also asked to bestir themselves, and to sign the Petition of the Delegation\* just as soon as possible.

The Delegation, as one can see from this short account of its work, is a perfectly practical solution of something about which many have dreamed to no purpose. As such, it should appeal to a practical nation, such as the Americans are supposed to be; and now that the matter has been brought before them in a public way, it ought certainly to receive from them a generous and ready support.

J. F. TWOMBLY.

\* Information about the Delegation, printed forms for signatures, etc., may be obtained at any of the following addresses: J. F. Twombly, Secretary, 34 Green Street, Brookline, Mass.; Dr. Percy M. Dawson, Associate Professor of Physiology, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Md.; Dr. E. V. Huntington, Assistant Professor of Mathematics, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.; Dr. Harry W. Morse, Instructor in Physics, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.; Dr. G. B. Viles, Associate Professor of German, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.